

29 (14) 15
The Abuses of CONSCIENCE:

SET FORTH IN A
S E R M O N,

694.9.24
150

PREACHED IN THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH
O F
St. PETER's, YORK,
AT THE
SUMMER ASSIZES,

BEFORE THE
Hon. Mr. Baron CLIVE,
AND THE

Hon. Mr. Baron SMYTHE,
On SUNDAY, *July 29, 1750.*

By LAURENCE STERNE, A. M.
Prebendary of the said Church.

Published at the Request of the High Sheriff and Grand Jury.

Y O R K:
Printed by CÆSAR WARD:
For JOHN HILDYARD, in Stonegate, 1750.
[Price SIX-PENCE.]

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

PRINTED IN A

FORM OF

THE

CATHEDRAL OF



OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF SUNDAY

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

21



Sir V
H
Y

Sir B
wi
ny
Br
N
H
T
Fa
La
be
M
da
to



T O

Sir WILLIAM PENNYMAN, *Bart*
High Sheriff of the County of
YORK,

A N D T O

Sir Edmund Anderson, *of* Kild-
wick-Percy, *Bart.* Ralph Pen-
nyman, *of* Beverly; Montagu
Brook, *of* Skelton; Thomas
Norcliffe, *of* Langton; John
Hutton, *of* Marske; William
Turner, *of* Clints; Thomas
Fawkes, *of* Farnley; Richard
Langley, *of* Wykeham-Ab-
bey; George Montgomery
Metham, *of* North-Cave; Tin-
dal Thompson, *of* Settering-
ton; Thomas Robinson, *of*
Beck-

ii DEDICATION.

Beckhouse; Edmund Charles
Blomberg, *of* Kirkby-Mispe-
ton; Francis Best, *of* Beverly;
Thomas Bradshaw, *of* Hemf-
worth; Roger Beckwith, *of*
Handall-Abbey; William Sut-
ton, *of* Carleton; Peter Con-
set, *of* Brawith; George Ive-
son, *of* Bilton; Richard Daw-
son, *of* Poppleton; William
Meeke, *of* Wighill-Park; John
Taylor, *of* Foulforth; Charles
Cottrell, *of* Scarborough; and
Ralph Lutton, *of* Knapton,
Esquires.

GENTLEMEN,

I Thank you for the great Compli-
ment pass'd on this Sermon, by your
unanimous Request to have it sent to
the Press; which I have done, without
send-

DEDICATION. iii

ending any Apology along with it for
its Unfitness to appear in Public;—Ex-
cuses of this Kind being generally so
well known, both as to Substance and
Form, that it is altogether unnecessary
to copy them.

I will therefore only beg your favour-
able Acceptance of it; and to believe, That
tho' my chief View in complying with
your Desire, was the Hopes of doing
Good, by contributing something to the
Interests of Religion and Morality;
yet it is no small Pleasure which I re-
ceive at the same Time, from the Op-
portunity it gives me of declaring how
great an Honour and Esteem I have for
so many Gentlemen of Worth and Cha-
racter. I am,

Your most humble

And most obedient Servant,

L. STERNE.

DEDICATION

Anding any Apology along with it for
as Unlikely to appear in Public;—
of this Kind being generally to
well known, both as to Substance and
form, that it is altogether unnecessary
to copy them. I have therefore
I will therefore only beg your favour
to accept of it, and to have it
my chief View in supplying you
your Debt, was the prospect of being
good, by contributing something to the
interests of Religion and Morality;
it is no small Pleasure which I re-
ceive at the same Time, from the Op-
portunity it gives me of declaring how
great an Honour and Pleasure I have for
many Gentlemen of Worth and Ori-
ginality. I am,

Your most humble

And most affectionate

J. STEPHENS



Co



depe
which
the m
be th
a goo

If
be a
Acco
own



HEBREWS xiii. 18.

— *For we trust we have a good
Conscience,* —



TRUST!—Trust we have
a good Conscience!—
Surely, you will say, if
there is any Thing in this
Life which a Man may
depend upon, and to the Knowledge of
which he is capable of arriving upon
the most indisputable Evidence, it must
be this very Thing,—Whether he has
a good Conscience, or no.

If a Man thinks at all, he cannot well
be a Stranger to the true State of this
Account;—He must be privy to his
own Thoughts and Desires;—He must

A

re-

remember his past Pursuits, and know certainly the true Springs and Motives, which, in general, have govern'd the Actions of his Life.

In other Matters we may be deceiv'd by false Appearances; and, as the Wise Man complains, *Hardly do we guess aright at the Things that are upon the Earth, and with Labour do we find the Things that are before us: —* But here the Mind has all the Evidence and Facts within herself: — Is conscious of the Web she has wove: — Knows its Texture and Fineness, and the exact Share which every Passion has had in working upon the several Designs, which Virtue or Vice has plann'd before her.

Now, — as Conscience is nothing else but the Knowledge which the Mind has within itself of this; and the Judgment, either of Approbation or Censure, which it unavoidably makes upon the successive Actions of our Lives, — 'tis plain, you will say, from the very
Terms

Terms of the Proposition, Whenever this inward Testimony goes against a Man, and he stands self-accused,—that he must necessarily be a *guilty Man*. And, on the contrary, When the Report is favourable on his Side, and his Heart condemns him not,—that it is not a Matter of *Trust*, as the Apostle intimates, but a Matter of Certainty and Fact, that the *Conscience* is *good*, and that the *Man* must be *good* also.

At first Sight, this may seem to be a true State of the Case; and I make no Doubt but the Knowledge of Right and Wrong is so truly impress'd upon the Mind of Man; that, did no such Thing ever happen, as that the Conscience of a Man, by long Habits of Sin, might (as the Scripture assures us, it may) insensibly become hard; and, like some tenderer Parts of his Body, by much Strefs, and continual hard Usage, lose, by Degrees, that nice Sense and Perception with which God and Nature endowed it. — Did this never happen: — Or
was

was it certain that Self-Love could never hang the least Bias upon the Judgment:—Or that the Little Interests below could rise up and perplex the Faculties of our upper Regions, and encompass them about with Clouds and thick Darkness:—Could no such Thing as Favour and Affection enter this sacred Court:—Did WIT disdain to take a Bribe in it, or was ashamed to shew its Face as an Advocate for an unwarrantable Enjoyment:—Or, lastly, were we assured that INTEREST stood always unconcern'd whilst the Cause was hearing,—and that PASSION never got into the Judgment Seat, and pronounced Sentence in the Stead of Reason, which is supposed always to preside and determine upon the Case:—Was this truly so, as the Objection must suppose, no Doubt, then, the Religious and Moral State of a Man would be exactly what He himself esteemed it; and the Guilt or Innocence of every Man's Life could be known, in general, by no better Measure, than the

the Degrees of his own Approbation or Censure.

I own, in one Case, whenever a Man's Conscience does accuse him (as it seldom errs on that Side) that he is Guilty; and, unless in melancholy and hypochondriac Cases, we may safely pronounce ~~upon~~, that there is always sufficient Grounds for the Accusation.

But, the Converse of the Proposition will not hold true, — namely, That wherever there is Guilt, the Conscience must accuse; and, if it does not, that a Man is therefore Innocent. — This is not Fact: — So that the common Consolation which some good Christian or other is hourly administering to himself, — That he thanks God, his Mind does not mis-give him; and that, consequently, he has a good Conscience, because he has a quiet one. — As current as the Inference is, and as infallible as the Rule appears at first Sight, yet, when you look nearer to it, and try the Truth of this Rule
upon

upon plain Facts, you find it liable to so much Error, from a false Application of it:—The Principle on which it goes so often perverted:—The whole Force of it lost, and sometimes so vilely cast away, that it is painful to produce the common Examples from human Life, which confirm this Account.

A Man shall be vicious and utterly debauched in his Principles; exceptionable in his Conduct to the World; shall live shameless,——in the open Commission of a Sin which no Reason or Pretence can justify;—a Sin, by which, contrary to all the Workings of Humanity within, he shall ruin for ever the deluded Partner of his Guilt;——rob her of her best Dowry;——and not only cover her own Head with Dishonour, but involve a whole virtuous Family in Shame and Sorrow for her Sake. Surely,——you'll think, Conscience must lead such a Man a troublesome Life:——He can have no Rest Night or Day from its Reproaches.

Alas!

Alas! Conscience had something else to do all this Time than break in upon him: As *Elijah* reproached the God *Baal*, this *Domestic God*, was either talking, or pursuing, or was in a Journey, or, peradventure, he slept and could not be awake. Perhaps he was gone out in Company, with Honour, to fight a Duel;—to pay off some Debt at Play;—or dirty Annuity the Bargain of his Lust.—Perhaps, Conscience all this Time was engaged at home, talking aloud against petty Larceny, and executing Vengeance upon such puny Crimes as his Fortune and Rank, in Life, secured him against all Temptation of committing:—So that he lives as merrily,—sleeps as soundly in his Bed;—and, at the last, meets Death with as much Unconcernedness,—perhaps, much more so than a much better Man.

Another is sordid, unmerciful; — A strait-hearted, selfish Wretch, incapable either of private Friendships, or public

public Spirit.—Take Notice how he passes by the Widow and Orphan in their Distress; and sees all the Miseries incident to human Life without a Sigh or a Prayer.—Shall not Conscience rise up and sting him on such Occasions? No.—Thank God, there is no Occasion. ‘I will pay every Man his own,—I have no Fornication to answer to my Conscience, no faithless Vows or Promises to make up, I have debauch’d no Man’s Wife or Child.—Thank God I am not as other Men, Adulterers, Unjust, or even as this Libertine who stands before me.’

A Third is crafty and designing in his Nature.—View his whole Life,—’Tis nothing else but a cunning Contexture of dark Arts and unequitable Subterfuges basely to defeat the true Intent of all Laws, plain Dealing and the safe Enjoyment of our several Properties.—You will see such a one, working out a Frame of little Designs upon the Ignorance and Perplexities of the poor and needy Man.—Shall raise

a Fortune upon the Inexperience of a Youth,—or the unsuspecting Temper of his Friend, who would have trusted him with his Life. When old Age comes on, and Repentance calls him to look back upon this black Account, and state it over again with his Conscience.—Conscience looks into the *Statutes at Large*,—finds perhaps no *express Law* broken by what he has done;—perceives no Penalty or Forfeiture incur'd;—sees no Scourge waving over his Head,—or Prison opening its Gate upon him.—What is there to affright his Conscience?—Conscience has got safely entrench'd behind the Letter of the Law, sits there invulnerable, fortified with *Cases* and *Reports* so strongly on all Sides,—that 'tis not Preaching can dispossess it of its Hold.

Another shall want even this Refuge,—shall break thro' all this Ceremony of slow Chicane; scorns the doubtful Workings of secret Plots and cautious Trains to bring about his Purpose—

B

pose—

pose.—See the bare-fac'd Villain how
 he cheats, lyes, perjures, robs, murders,—
 Horrid! But indeed much better was
 not to be expected in this Case.—The
 poor Man was in the dark!—His Priest
 had got the keeping of his Conscience
 —and all he had let him know of
 was, That he must believe in the *Pope*
 —Go to Mass;—Cross himself;—
 tell his Beads; —be a good Catholic
 and that this in all Conscience was
 enough to carry him to Heaven
 What?—If he perjures?—Why,
 He had a mental Reservation in it. But
 if he is so wicked and abandoned
 Wretch as you represent him,—If
 robs, or murders, will not Conscience
 on every such Act, receive a Wound
 self?—Ay,—But the Man has carried
 it to Confession, the Wound digested
 there, and will do well enough,—and
 in a short Time be quite healed up
 Absolution.

O *Popery*! What hast thou to
 answer for?—when not content with

how too many natural and fatal Ways thro'
 s,—which the Heart is every Day thus
 wa treacherous to itself above all Things
 -Th—Thou hast wilfully set open this
 Prie wide Gate of Deceit before the Face of
 ience this unwary *Traveller*,—too apt, God
 of knows, to go astray of himself,—and
Pope confidently speak Peace to his Soul,
 f;—when there is no Peace.

Of this the common Instances, which
 have drawn out of Life, are too noto-
 ry,—ious to require much Evidence. If
 . B any Man doubts the Reality of them,
 oned r thinks it impossible for Man to be
 —If uch a Bubble to himself,—I must re-
 nscent r him a Moment to his Reflections, and
 und all then venture to trust the Appeal
 s carri with his own Heart. Let him consider
 dige how different a Degree of Detestati-
 —a, Numbers of wicked Actions stand
 d up ere, tho' equally bad and vicious in
 their own Natures—He will soon find
 at such of them as strong Inclination
 to Custom have prompted him to com-
 with it, are generally dress'd out and pain-

ted with all the false Beauties which a
soft and flattering Hand can give them
and that the others, to which he feel
no Propensity, appear, at once, naked
and deformed, surrounded with all the
true Circumstances of Folly and Disho
nour.

When *David* surprized *Saul* sleeping
in the Cave, and cut off the Skirt of
his Robe,—we read, his Heart smote
him for what he had done.—But, in
the Matter of *Uriah*, where a faithful
and gallant Servant, whom he ought
to have lov'd and honour'd, fell to make
Way for his Lust; where *Conscience* had
so much greater Reason to take the alarm,
—his Heart smote him not.—In the
whole Year had almost passed from the
first Commission of that Crime—to the
Time *Nathan* was sent to reprove him
and we read not once of the least Sor-
row or Compunction of Heart, which
testified during all that Time, for what
he had done.

Thus Conscience, this once able Monitor,—placed on high as a Judge within us,—and intended, by our Maker, as a just and equitable one too,—by an unhappy Train of Causes and Impediments,—takes often such imperfect Cognizance of what passes,—does its Office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly, that it is not to be trusted alone : And therefore, we find, there is a Necessity, an absolute Necessity, of joining another Principle with it, to aid, if not govern, its Determinations.

So that if you would form a just Judgment of what is of infinite Importance to you not to be misled, in ; namely, in what Degree of real Merit you stand, either as an honest Man,—an useful Citizen,—a faithful Subject to your King,—or a good Servant to your God, call in RELIGION and MORALITY.—Look—What is written in the Law of God? — How readest thou? — Consult calm Reason, and the unchangeable Obligations

bligations of Justice and Truth,—What say they?

Let Conscience determine the Matter upon these Reports,—and then, if *thy Heart condemn thee not*,—which is the Case the Apostle supposes,—the Rule will be infallible,—*Thou wilt have Confidence towards God*; — that is, have just Grounds to believe the Judgment thou hast past upon thyself, is the Judgment of God; and nothing else but an Anticipation of that righteous Sentence, which will be pronounced, hereafter, upon thee by that BEING, before whom thou art finally to give an Account of thy Actions.

Blessed is the Man, indeed then, as the Author of the Book of *Ecclesiasticus* expresses it, *Who is not pricked with the Multitude of his Sins.*—*Blessed is the Man whose Heart hath not condemned him, and who is not fallen from his Hope in the Lord.* Whether he be rich, continues he, or whether he be poor,—

poor,—if he have a good Heart (a Heart thus guided and inform'd)—He shall at all Times rejoice in a chearful Countenance.—His Mind shall tell him more than seven Watchmen that sit above upon a Tower on high.—

In the darkeſt Doubts it ſhall conduct him ſafer than a thouſand Caſuiſts, and give the State he lives in a better Security for his Behaviour, than all the Clauſes and Reſtrictions put together, which the Wiſdom of the Legislature is forced to multiply,—forced I ſay, as Things ſtand; human Laws being not a Matter of original Choice, but of pure Neceſſity, brought in to fence againſt the miſchievous Effects of thoſe Conſciences, which are no Law unto themſelves: Wiſely intending by the many Proviſions made, That in all ſuch corrupt or miſguided Caſes, where Principle and the Checks of Conſcience will not make us upright,—to ſupply their Force, and by the Terrors of Jails and Halters oblige us to it.

To

To have the Fear of God before our Eyes; and, in our mutual Dealings with each other, to govern our Actions by the eternal Measures of Right and Wrong:—The first of these will comprehend the Duties of Religion: The second those of Morality; which are so inseparably connected together, that you cannot divide these two *Tables*, even in Imagination (tho' the Attempt is often made in Practice) without breaking and mutually destroying them both.

I said the Attempt is often made;—and so it is;—there being nothing more common than to see a Man, who has no Sense at all of Religion,—and indeed has *so much* of Honesty, as to pretend to none; who would yet take it as the bitterest Affront, should you but hint at a Suspicion of his Moral Character,—or imagine he was not conscientiously just, and scrupulous to the uttermost Mite.

When

When there is some Appearance that it is so,—tho' one is not willing even to suspect the Appearance of so great a Virtue, as moral Honesty;—yet, were we to look into the Grounds of it in the present Case, I am persuaded we should find little Reason to envy such a Man the Honour of his Motive.

Let him declaim as pompously as he can on the Subject, it will be found at last to rest upon no better Foundation than either his Interest, his Pride, his Ease; or some such little and changeable Passion, as will give us but small Dependence upon his Actions in Matters of great Strefs.

Give me Leave to illustrate this by an Example.

I know the Banker I deal with, or the Physician I usually call in, to be neither of them Men of much Religion: I hear them make a Jest of it every
C Day,

Day, and treat all its Sanctions with so much Scorn and Contempt, as to put the Matter past Doubt. Well,—notwithstanding this, I put my Fortune into the Hands of the one,—and, what is dearer still to me, I trust my Life to the honest Skill of the other.—Now let me examine what is my Reason for this great Confidence.—Why,—in the first Place, I believe there is no Probability that either of them will employ the Power, I put into their Hands, to my Disadvantage. I consider that Honesty serves the Purposes of this Life.—I know their Success in the World depends upon the Fairness of their Characters;—that they cannot hurt me without hurting themselves more.

But put it otherwise, namely, that Interest lay for once on the other Side—That a Case should happen where the one, without Stain to his Reputation, could secrete my Fortune, and leave me naked in the World;—

th

that the Other could send me out of it, and enjoy an Estate by my Death, without Dishonour to himself or his Art.—In this Case what Hold have I of either of them?—Religion, the strongest of all Motives, is out of the Question.—Interest, the next most powerful Motive in this World, is strongly against me.—I have nothing left to cast into the Scale to ballance this Temptation.—I must lay at the Mercy of Honour,—or some such capricious Principle.—Strait Security! for two of my best and most valuable Blessings,—my Property and my Life!

As therefore we can have no Dependence upon Morality without Religion;—so, on the other Hand, there is nothing better to be expected from Religion without Morality; nor can any Man be suppos'd to discharge his Duties to God, (whatever fair Appearances he may hang out, that he does so) if he does not pay as conscientious a Regard

gard to the Duties, which he owes his Fellow-Creature.

This is a Point capable in itself of strict Demonstration.—Nevertheless, 'tis no Rarity to see a Man whose real moral Merit stands very low, who yet entertains the highest Notion of himself, in the Light of a devout and religious Man. He shall not only be covetous, revengeful, implacable,—but even wanting in Points of common Honesty.—Yet because he talks loud against the Infidelity of the Age,—is zealous for some Points of Religion,—goes twice a Day to Church,—attends the Sacraments,—and amuses himself with a few Instrumental Duties of Religion,—shall cheat his Conscience into a Judgment that for this he is a religious Man, and has discharged faithfully his Duty to God: And you will find, that such a Man, thro' Force of this Delusion, generally looks down with Spiritual Pride upon every other Man who has less

Af-

Affectation of Piety, tho', perhaps, ten Times more moral Honesty than himself.

This is likewise a sore Evil under the Sun; and I believe there is no one mistaken Principle which, for its Time, has wrought more serious Mischiefs. For a general Proof of this,—examine the History of the *Romish Church*.—See what Scenes of Cruelty, Murders, Rapines, Bloodshed, have all been sanctified by a Religion not strictly governed by Morality.

In how many Kingdoms of the World, has the crusading Sword of this misguided Saint-Errant spared neither Age, or Merit, or Sex, or Condition.—And, as he fought under the Banners of a Religion, which set him loose from Justice and Humanity,—he shewed none,—mercilessly trampled upon both, heard neither the Cries of the Unfortunate, nor pitied their Distresses.

If

If the Testimony of past Centuries in this Matter is not sufficient,—consider at this Instant, how the Votaries of that Religion are every Day thinking to do Service and Honour to God, by Actions which are a Dishonour and Scandal to themselves.

To be convinced of this, go with me for a Moment into the Prisons of the Inquisition.—Behold *Religion* with Mercy and Justice chain'd down under her Feet,—there sitting ghastly upon a black Tribunal, propp'd up with Racks and Instruments of Torment.—Hark!—What a piteous Groan!—See the melancholy Wretch who utter'd it, just brought forth to undergo the Anguish of a Mock-Trial, and endure the utmost Pains that a studied System of *religious Cruelty* has been able to invent. Behold this helpless Victim delivered up to his Tormentors. His Body so wasted with Sorrow and long Confinement, - you'll see every Nerve and Muscle

Muscle as it suffers.—Observe the last Movement of that horrid Engine.—What Convulsions it has thrown him into.—Consider the Nature of the Posture in which he now lies stretch'd.—What exquisite Torture he endures by it.—'Tis all Nature can bear.—Good God! See how it keeps his weary Soul hanging upon his trembling Lips, willing to take its Leave,—but cruelly not suffer'd to depart. Behold the unhappy Wretch led back to his Cell,—dragg'd out of it again to meet the Flames,—and the Insults in his last Agonies, which this Principle—This Principle that there *can* be Religion without Morality, has prepared for him.

The surest Way to try the Merit of any disputed Notion,—is to trace down the Consequences such a Notion has produced, and compare them with the *Spirit* of Christianity.—'Tis the short and decisive Rule, which our Saviour
has

has left for these and such like Cases,—
and is worth a thousand Arguments.—
*By their Fruits, says he, ye shall know
them.*

Thus Religion and Morality, like fast
Friends and natural Allies, can never be
set at Variance, without the mutual Ruin
and Dishonour of them both ;—and
whoever goes about this unfriendly Of-
fice, is no Well-wisher to either ;—and
whatever he pretends, he deceives his
own Heart, and, I fear, his Morality as
well as his Religion will be vain.

I will add no farther to the Length
of this Discourse, than by two or three
short and independent Rules, deducible
from what has been said,

1st. Whenever a Man talks loudly
against Religion, always suspect that
it is not his Reason but his Passions
which have got the Better of his Creed.

—A

—A *bad Life* and a *good Belief* are disagreeable and troublesome Neighbours, and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other Cause but Quietness Sake.

2^{dly}. When a Man thus represented, tells you in any particular Instance, that such a Thing goes *against* his Conscience,—always believe he means exactly the same Thing as when he tells you such a Thing goes against his Stomach,—a present Want of Appetite being generally the true sense of both.

In a Word,—trust the Man in nothing—who has not a Conscience in every Thing.

And in your own Case remember this plain Distinction, a Mistake, in which, has ruin'd Thousands.—That your Conscience is not a Law;—no,—God and Reason made the Law, and has placed Conscience within you to determine,—not like an *Asiatic Cadi*, according

cording to the Ebbs and Flows of his own Passions:—But, like a *British Judge* in this Land of Liberty, who makes no new Law,—but faithfully declares that glorious Law which he finds already written.

F I N I S.



By the same AUTHOR,

The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zerephath, consider'd.

A

CHARITYSERMON,

Preach'd on Good Friday, April 17, 1747.

For the Support of Two Charity-Schools in York.

Printed for JOHN HILDYARD. Price 6d.

of his
ritish
who
fally
h he

ellor
trist
trist
trist
trist
trist

of
trist
trist

N,

ork.